



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.3543 | FAX (517) 373.0927

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/hammerstrom/

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Contact: Amy Zaagman
1-888-477-8238

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

*Senate Health Policy Chair calls for more efforts to improve education,
increase prevention*

LANSING – This month is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month and State Senator Beverly Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, Senate Health Policy Committee Chair, has been working to spread the word about the disease and ways to prevent it.

“Cervical cancer rates have decreased significantly in the last 60 years due to widespread screening, yet an estimated 4,100 women die in our country each year from this common malignancy,” Hammerstrom said. “Educating Michigan residents about the causes of this disease and the ways to prevent it are the keys to saving women’s lives. Prevention and early detection are the tools we need to fight cervical cancer.”

The Michigan Senate passed a resolution last year designating January as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. Hammerstrom also sponsored legislation asking the governor to appoint a special task force to identify ways to raise public awareness of the disease, including educating the public on new advanced testing options.

In 2003, Hammerstrom served on a national Cervical Cancer Task Force with other women legislators across the country. Members were educated about the disease and the virus shown to cause it: human papillomavirus, or HPV.

The task force was commissioned by Women In Government, a Washington, D.C. based non-profit organization representing state-level elected women officials. In 2004, WIG launched its national “Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign,” encouraging state governments to pass legislation to improve cervical cancer prevention efforts.

Since then, Hammerstrom has worked to raise public awareness about cervical cancer and the importance of early detection.

(more)

“Studies have shown that women who receive regular screenings can completely prevent this type of cancer from invading their bodies,” Hammerstrom said. “This is the first time we know of a way to safeguard ourselves from a specific type of cancer.”

In women who are screened periodically, studies show that the Pap smear is able to identify women with cervical cancer or early signs ranging between 51 and 85 percent. Now, however, a test exists that can detect the presence of the virus that actually causes cervical cancer with a high degree of accuracy.

Scientists now know that high-risk types of HPV virus cause almost all cases of cervical cancer. A new DNA test for women who have a higher risk of exposure to HPV has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for women 30 and older. When used along with the traditional Pap smear, it is recognized as the screening guideline of several leading medical groups.

“By offering the HPV test along with the Pap to all women 30 and older, we can better identify women most likely to develop the abnormal cell changes that lead to cervical cancer and thus, through early intervention, stop this deadly disease in its tracks,” Hammerstrom said. “I urge every woman to discuss this new test with her doctor. A few minutes more in the doctor’s office could save a life.”

Hammerstrom served as chair of the WIG Board of Directors from 2004 to 2005. She is currently serving her last term in the Michigan Senate.

For more information about cervical cancer and WIG’s “Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign,” please visit Senator Hammerstrom’s website at www.senate.michigan.gov/hammerstrom.

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